

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF

the late EDWARD FIELD

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Description of the original pamphlet borrowed
from Mrs. Bertha Willis, Luseland, Sask.,
July 18, 1950. *This pamphlet was tracked down
with the assistance of D.R. Robinson.*

Field, Edward, 1845-1912

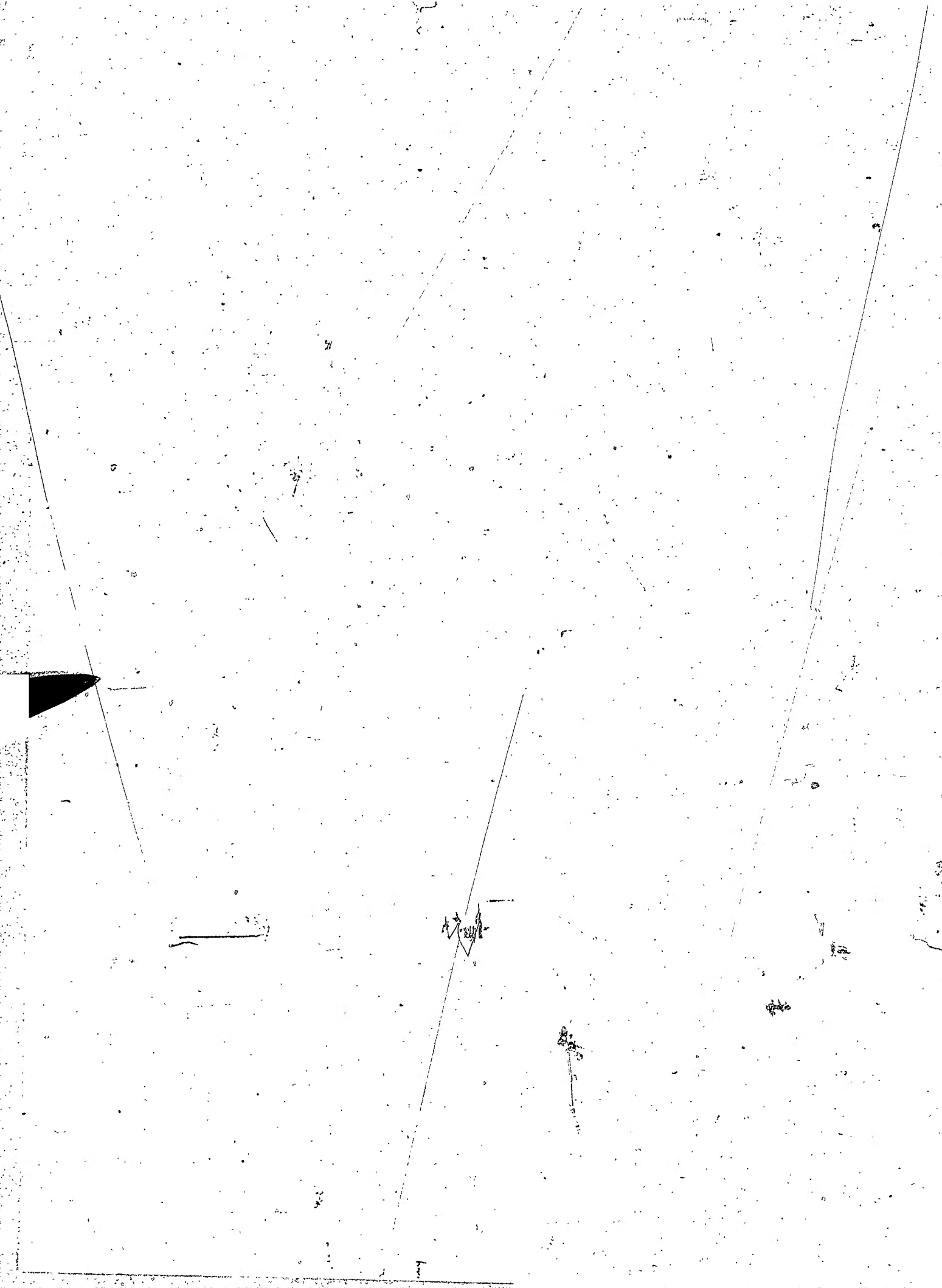
Biographical sketch of the late Edward Field.
Wadena, Wadena herald, 193 ,
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JUL 31 1950

A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE LATE EDWARD FIELD, WRITTEN BY
REQUEST FOR THE "SHEHO HERALD."

I was born on September 7th, 1845, at Thame, Oxfordshire, England. In 1866 a townsman, one Thomas Howes returning from United States for a visit, so fired my ambition that I gave my parents no peace until they consented to my leaving home, which I did on February 7th, 1866. Coming straight to Hastings, Minnesota, I got a position as clerk in the First National Bank of that place, where I stayed seventeen months, but hearing of buffalo hunting, Red Indians, and the fur trade in Red River settlement, British North America, then so called, I got permission to leave, and struck for St. Paul. I there fortunately ran across Mr. Drever, a fur trader from Fort Garry, who was willing to take me with him, and whose carts were waiting for him at St. Cloud, 80 miles away farther west, at the end of the railroad, and about 450 miles from Fort Garry. His outfit consisted of 16 oxen and red river carts, one man taking charge of four oxen, one tied behind the other. The carts were home-made, all of wood, and not a piece of iron about them, and the harness was likewise home-made. The carts had broad felloes and high wheels, and loaded with 1000 pounds an ox could easily walk through the numerous mud holes to be met with. For the first 100 miles of the road there were a few settlers, but after that it was all a wilderness. On our journey we passed the military fort at Fort Abercombe, situated on the Red River, and also another one at Pembina, N.D. As this was soon after the great Sioux Indian Massacre in Minnesota in 1863, it was not considered any too safe to cross the plains; and I can well remember one of the men telling the rest in a most serious manner that when he went to the river (which was heavily wooded) he had seen the embers of a Sioux fire from the previous day. It took us four weeks to reach Fort Garry, now Winnipeg, and I engaged with my friend Mr. Drever to keep a small trading post for him on the east side of the river, in the French half-breed settlement. The following year was a very bad one, as the grasshoppers had deposited their eggs the previous summer, and had hatched out in countless millions, destroying everything. We could not eat the fish caught in the River or any eggs the few hens in the country then laid, for everything tasted grasshopper. Not a bushel of

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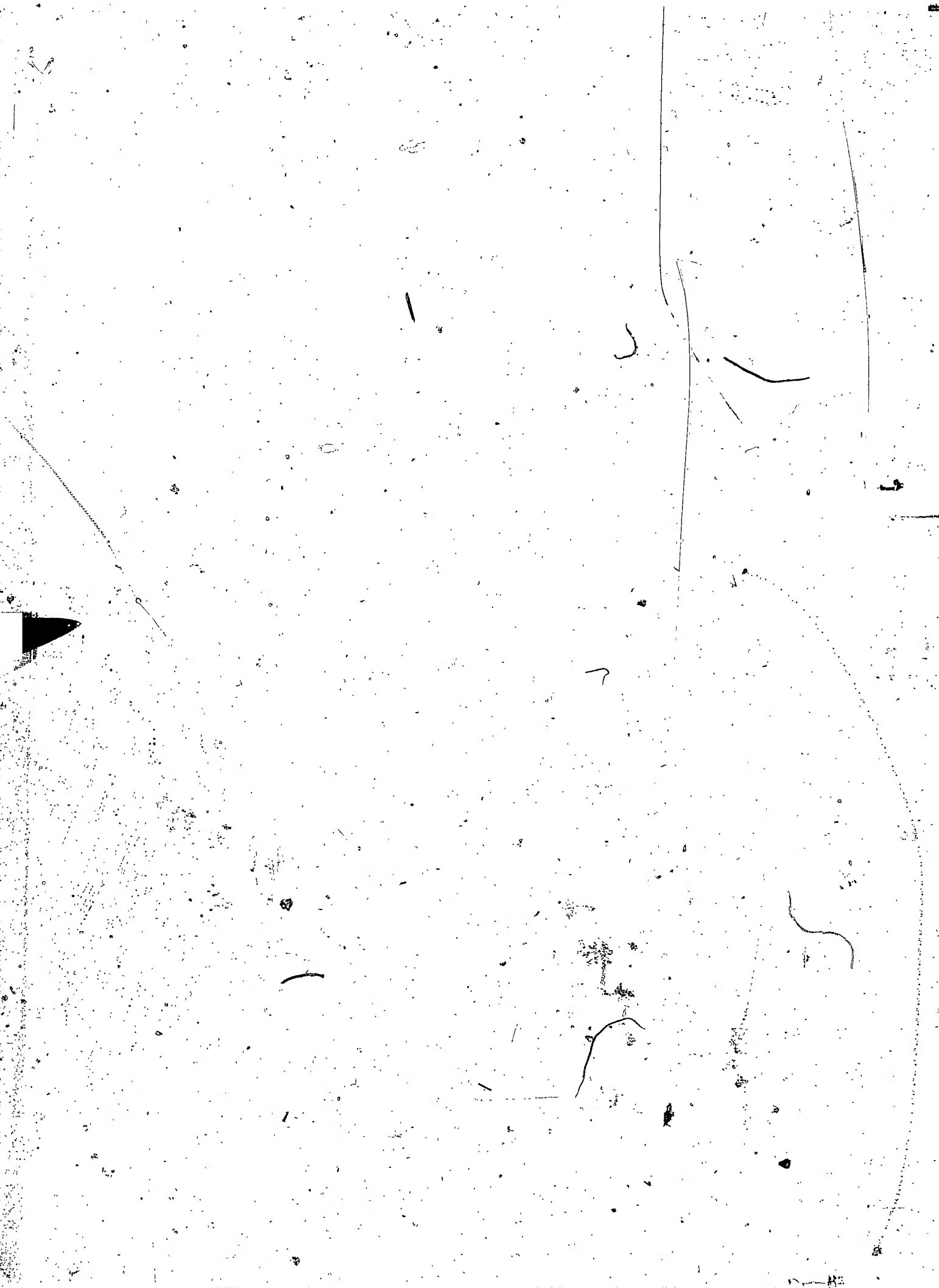
any kind of grain was raised, nor anything in the shape of garden stuff, as peas were the only vegetable to which they objected. If you laid your coat on the ground for five minutes it was full of holes and even tobacco did not come amiss. Every step you took a dozen of them were crushed, and the cart wheels were greasy with their dead bodies. However, as soon as they could fly they all left some time in July, and some potatoes were put in then. I stayed with Mr. Drever that summer and feeling homesick in the fall made a trip to England, but was glad enough to get back again in the spring.

On my return to St. Cloud I was lucky enough to meet a few Red River people just starting back. One of them, a Mr. Henry McDermot, had a spare horse which he lent me, and I rode horseback all the way, making the trip to Winnipeg in ten days. We were travelling light, as our horses had no grain, and I question if they knew the taste of it. I must digress a little from my personal biography here to explain that this year 1869, the Canadian Government had consummated their arrangement with the Hudson Bay Co. to pay them \$300,000 for their right to what was then called Ruperts Land, that is, the whole of what is now Western Canada, from the boundaries of old Ontario to the eastern boundary of British Columbia. The Company was also to receive one twentieth of the land, and he it remarked, that the people were to get nothing. Sold over like a lot of sheep, without a vote or say in the matter. The Canadian Government had already sent out a survey party under Mr. Snow to cut out and make a road from Pointe-de-Chene eastwards to the north-west angle of the Lake of the Woods, so that there should be a road on British territory all the way to Ontario. To go back to my story. On arriving in Winnipeg in 1869, I engaged with Mr. Snow on the road above mentioned, but found it could not be managed, as the country was too rough and difficult to get through with the party we had and time allowed. It was here I met Thomas Scott, who was brutally murdered by Louis Reil and his men after a mock Court-Martial in the rebellion of 1869-70. I then engaged with the Hudson's Bay Co., but as they did not need my services until winter, I made another trip to St. Cloud with 16 carts and 13 men. Reaching Pembina on the return journey we heard rumours

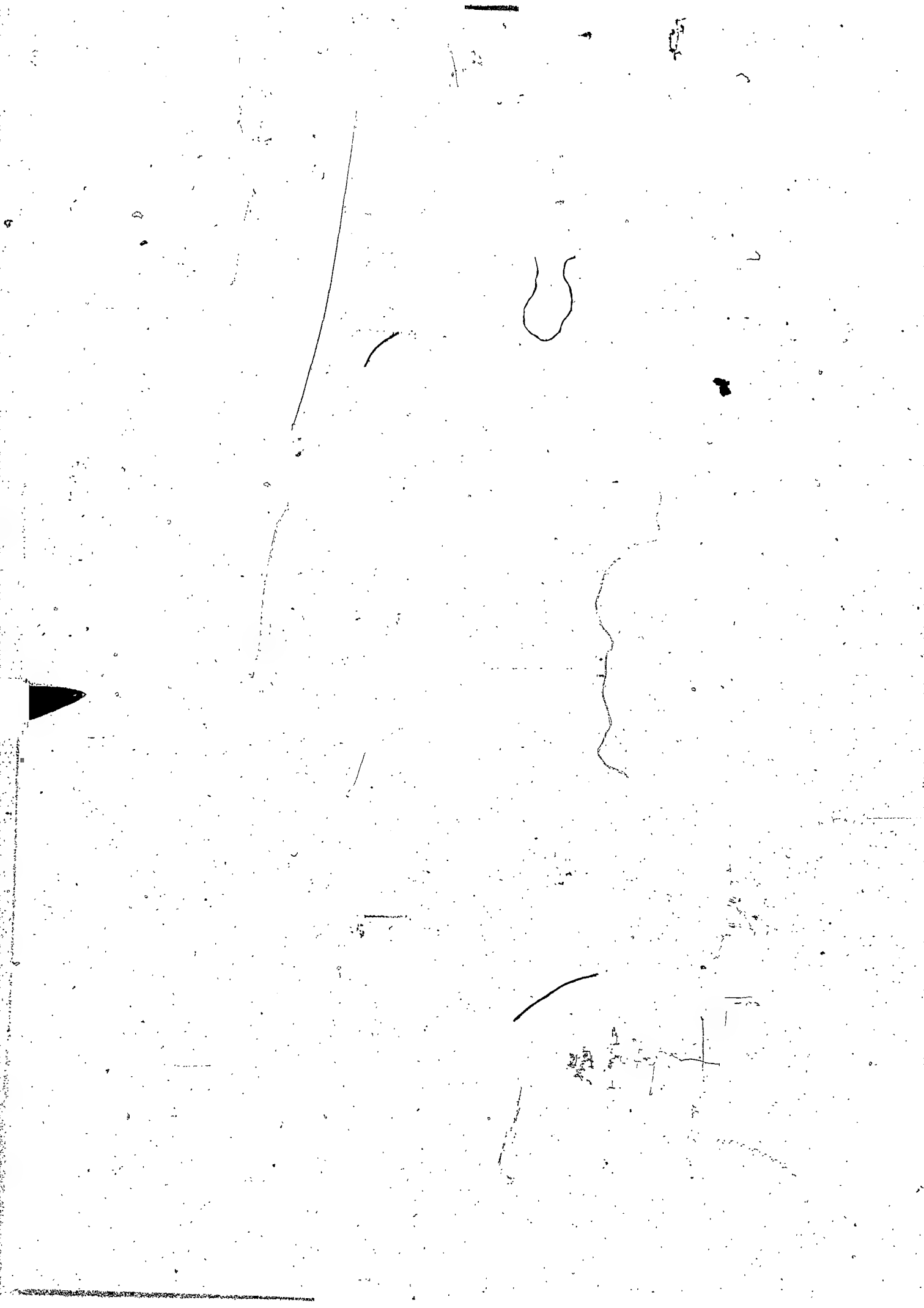
of trouble with the French half-breeds, and on reaching Riviere La Salle (stinking River) 7 miles east of Fort Garry, we found a strong rail fence built right across the road, joining the thick bush on each side, and with a gate to the approach to the bridge. There were already there about 50 French half-breeds with their old flint guns, to prevent Lieut-Governor McDougall coming in. A few days afterwards the half-breeds marched into Winnipeg, and took charge of Fort Garry, helping themselves to all they wanted in the way of cash, clothes, provisions, horses, etc., but all this belongs to history. I presented myself to the Governor of the Hudson Bay Co., and was sent off to Fort Alexander near the mouth of the Winnipeg River, and as soon as the rivers and lakes were fast I was sent up to Mattawa, where three rivers joined near Lac Seul. I traded there all winter, but in the following spring I was ordered to Fort Frances, on the international boundary, where the town of Goo-che-ching is now. I started from there with the York boats for Hudson Bay, but on my way I was called into Fort Garry to work in the office for a time. From there I was sent to White Horse Plains, where farming and dairying were carried on on quite a large scale by the H. B. Co. for the purpose of supplying their posts with produce. Here I had the honor and pleasure of meeting Lieut-Gen. Wolseley, now Lord Wolseley, F. M., who led the troops through to quell the Riel rebellion. Lieutenant-Governor Archibald, the first Lieut.-Gov. sent here for the Dominion, and Captain Butler now General Butler of South African fame. My duties were very light and pleasant, involving a great deal of horse-back exercise, hunting up stray animals and buying buffalo robes, pemmican and dry meat from the plain-hunters coming in from the west after their winter's hunt and trade. In the fall I was again shifted, and this time to Portage la Prairie, then not the size of Sheho. In the following year I was married and stayed at Portage until fall. I was then called to Lower Fort Garry to meet Donald A. Smith, then was told of my appointment to Athabasca Lake. In those days this post was considered very far north, and for some forgotten reason I declined to go, in consequence of which I left the service of the Hudson Bay Co.

After leaving the Hudson's Bay Co. along with my wife, I moved out to the

First Crossing, White Mud River, now Westbourne. I was the first white settler north-west of the Portage, and I rented a small house from one of the old inhabitants who had moved up from St. Andrews. The following winter I did what nearly all others did after leaving the Hudson's Bay Co., and this was to start fur trading with the Indians on my own account. I got together a train of dogs, travelled up to the north end of Lake Manitoba, and out to where the town of Gladstone now is, then called the third crossing of the White Mud River, and came south of the Portage to the Buckfat Lakes, now Rock and Swan Lake. In the summer I did nothing, and the following winter again followed the fur trade until I was laid up with rheumatic fever at Manitoba House, a Hudson's Bay Co. trading post about 70 miles from Westbourne, and on the shores of the Lake of that name. The following summer I had my first experience in farming, having formed a sort of partnership with Mr. McIvor, my father-in-law, who was farming at Portage La Prairie. All I remember is that I walked behind some old fashioned wooden harrows for a couple of days in the seeding season, and after the wheat was threshed I started with three Red River carts, two oxen and one horse, for the nearest mill. This was at St. James Parish, about four miles west of Winnipeg, and 80 miles from home. Having got the wheat turned into flour, I started for home, but winter set in the same day, and before night there was a foot of snow on the ground. In those days, however, everybody was your friend, and every house a stopping house, and no bill to pay when you left, even if you stayed a week. Leaving my carts and borrowing 3 single ox sleighs from Mr. Angus McKay, with whom I stayed, in due course of time I reached Westbourne with the flour. This was my first and last attempt at wheat raising. In the following summer I bought a piece of land from one of the old settlers there. It consisted of 24 chains frontage on the White Mud River and ran back 2 miles on the clear prairie. For this I paid \$50.00. The White Mud is thickly wooded with fine oak trees, and I built my first house of oak logs. In the same year I sold 12 chains of frontage and my house for \$1000.00, and having built another one on the remainder of the frontage again sold for the same price. My customers were some young Englishmen, who took a fancy to the place. By this time a few settlers had commenced to move westward, and among the first to cross the White Mud River was a Mr. L. Cory, father of



the present Deputy Minister of the Interior. In the following spring I moved out to Big Point on Lake Manitoba, now called Wild Oak, and took up my first homestead in 1875 or 1876. I followed my old business as fur trader, and also raised quite a number of cattle. That summer the whole country was visited with grasshoppers again, and although they came too late to do damage, they stayed long enough to deposit their eggs. That winter I had another serious attack of rheumatic fever, and the following summer I paid a visit to the Old Country. Returning in the fall I came by rail as far as Glyndon, and then took a steamboat for Winnipeg. This year was a very poor one, as the new settlers who had come in since the country was opened up, in spite of all the natives and old Hudson's Bay Co. men could advise them, risked their seed in the ground, but never gathered a bushel. The hoppers hatched out in millions and devoured everything. Flour was \$7.50 a sack in Winnipeg, all brought in from the States, and as nearly as I can remember there were 600 ox carts sent down to Minnesota that fall for seed wheat, brought in by the Government, I believe. After this I turned my attention to freighting. In these early days it was only a small steamboat that came to Winnipeg, and in very high water she came up the Assiniboine River as far as Portage la Prairie. The Government were sending surveyors out west. Already the North-West Mounted Police Force had been organized, small forts had been built, and centres of trade established, but the great difficulty was to get freight to them, and freighters were in great demand. Freighting was all done by ox and Red River carts, one man driving four carts, and after I had been at this for three years I had thirty oxen and carts, and 8 drivers. This was, I think, in 1877, the commencement of the wet years, and to describe the roads from Winnipeg to Fort Ellice, Fort Qu'Appelle and Toughwood Hills, points to which we freighted, is beyond me. There was not a bridge anywhere and I fully believe that there were 100 mosquitoes to where there is now one. All the rivers and creeks were full to overflowing, but its an ill wind that blows no one any good, for a Mr. McKinnon, who lived at Two Creeks, 30 miles west of the Portage, cleared \$3000.00 one summer by building a floating bridge over a very bad creek. The old crossing happened to be on his homestead and fencing it in he put up a gate to the bridge and there he or one of his sons stood all day taking in 10 cents



a cart and 25 cents a wagon. When I mention that one day I counted 370 carts coming down to Winnipeg, loaded with buffalo robes, furs and moccasins, and that at the lowest estimation 100 crossed every day going west, to say nothing of settlers, you can imagine the harvest he had. In the following year it was the same. It was on one of these freighting trips out west I met the fine young buffalo that the late James McKay brought in from the Plains, and which founded the herd owned by Lord Strathcona at Silver Heights, near Winnipeg.

In 1880 the water of Lake Winnipeg rose so high that it came into my stable, so I thought it time to leave. I had already received the patent for my place, but under the circumstances was allowed to homestead again. Therefore I pulled out once more, but it was no little undertaking. We had four children, one three months old, 30 oxen and carts, and 30 head of cattle, not to mention household effects. The Shell River country, now Russell, was my destination, there were some 250 miles of bad roads, rivers and creeks to cross, and with cows calving and straying, sticking in mud holes, fighting mosquitoes and numerous other difficulties, it was six weeks ere we reached the spot where Russell now stands, then called the Shell River district. Prairie City, or Tanners Crossing, now Minnedosa, was our nearest town 100 miles off. As we passed the C. P. R. engineers were surveying their main line to run through Minnedosa, but of course the line was taken further south. I mention the foregoing to show the difficulties and troubles one had to contend with in these days locating a new home compared with present day immigrant. We managed to put a lot of hay up the first year, and Messrs. Shield & Co., of Brandon, sent in the first lumber outfit in the Duck Mountains. We sold all the hay we could spare at \$50.00 a ton delivered into camp, and I need not say it was no easy matter to deliver it. The oats for the outfit were brought from what is now Rapid City, and were \$2.50 a bushel. I lived here for eight years, during four of which I carried the mail from Asessippi via Russell to Fort Ellice. I also carried on a livery business, and as our nearest station was Moosomin, 60 miles away, there was always a lot of driving to do. I also dealt a good deal in horses and had always quite a bunch on hand, and, although I had nothing to do with farming I

managed to prosper. But times and customs were changing, and the new order of things did not suit me, so when the herd law was passed that finished me, and I got out in 1883. Then I made another move north, and spent a winter in at Sheppards Bush, now called Togo, but in the following year I moved within 5 miles of Fort Pelly, on the west bank of the Assiniboine River. Here again I was 75 miles from Russell, our nearest town. I went in for raising cattle and horses, and stayed there I think four years, but as the Indian Department was applying to the Government for all the land lying between the White Sand and Assiniboine Rivers for the sole use of the Indians, and as I was only a squatter at the time, and the request was likely to be granted, I had to pull stakes once more and look for another home. This was in 1892, when I came out to the bank of Fishing Lake, where I have resided ever since. I then turned to my old occupation of fur-trading with the Indians and did quite a considerable business with them. I again took a mail contract between Fishing Lake and Yorkton, kept a fair lot of cattle, but went more into horse raising, which I consider a preferable occupation. At the present time I am out of all of these occupations, having given them up to those who are younger and more fit for the battle of life. The rest of my days, that God may grant me, I hope to spend in rest and quietness. Before closing these memoirs I would like to say that I have lately lost what is, or should be, the greatest loss a man can sustain, and that is the loss of his wife. She who has recently gone was my helpmate, counsellor and sharer in all my ups and downs, troubles and hardships in our early days, and shared most willingly all the movings and discomforts attending such. At the same time when I look back upon the past and recall many little incidents that I have not mentioned, here I lift up my heart to my Maker for all the blessings I have received from him, and for the care he has bestowed upon me and mine. I hope that to some, if not all, this sketch of my career may prove worth reading.- EDWARD FIELD.

Mr. Field can rest assured his personal reminiscences have given untold pleasure to the numerous readers of the "Standard", whether or not they are personally acquainted with him. His recollections of the pioneering hardships would prove a salutary lesson to those who expect a paternal Government to see them safely housed and a Maternal Railway Co. to run a track to their door. Mr. Field knows whereof he

speaks, and his words should teach patience. For twelve years Mr. Field has held a commission as Justice of the Peace, and for eight years he has been Fishery Guardian in the service of the Dominion Government. Added to these he has been Secretary-Treasurer of the Fishing Lake S. D. for about ten years, and to I. I. D. 17-H-2 since its organization. One of the real English squires, Mr. Field has friends wherever he turns, and the "Standard" trusts he will yet be spared for many days of usefulness.- [Ed., "Standard."]

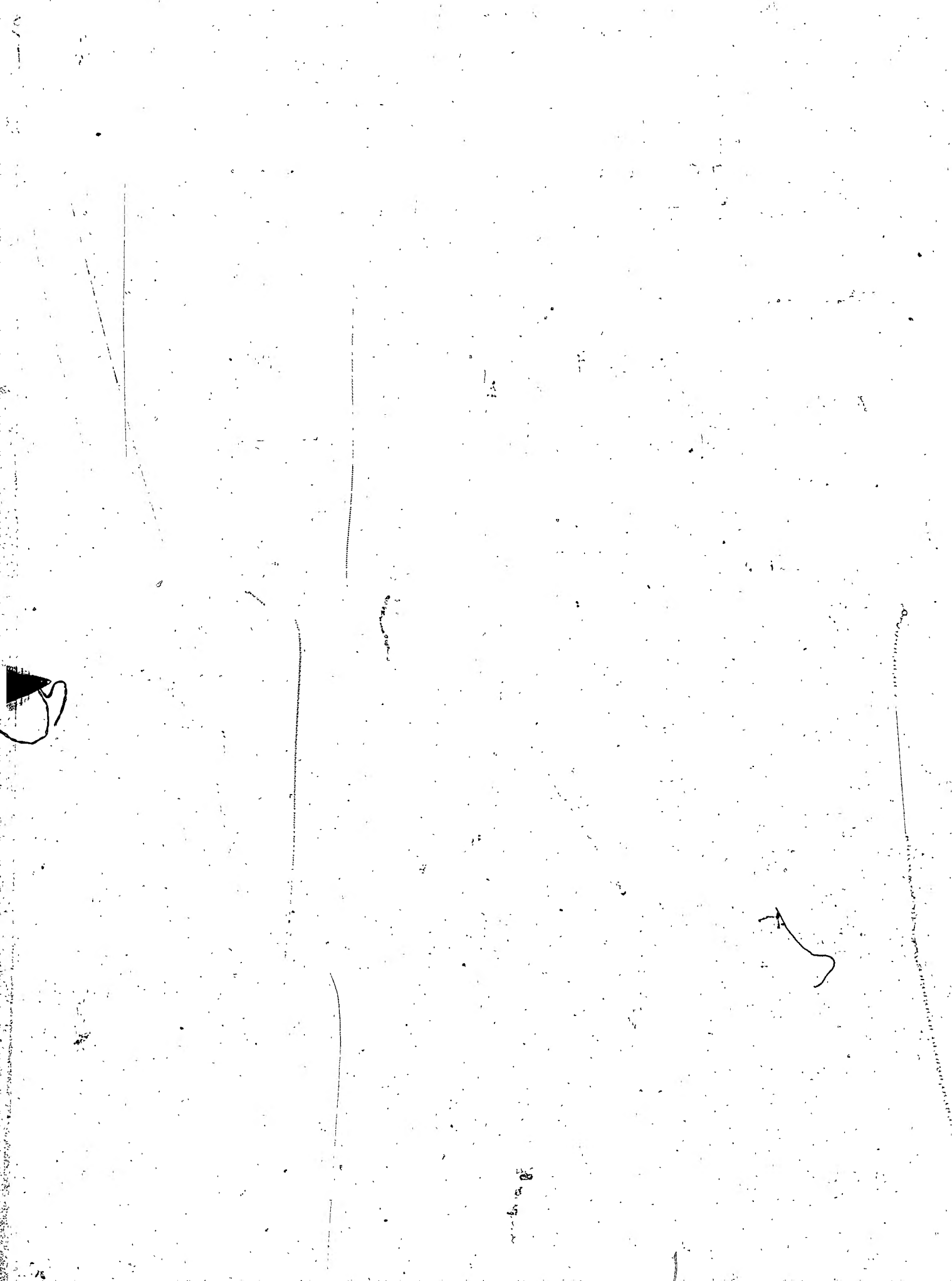
From the Wadena Herald.

In the death of Mr. Edward Field, which occurred here on Saturday last, Wadena has lost an old and respected citizen and western Canada a frontiersman of repute. Mr. Field spent last winter in England, and since his return in the spring has been in a delicate state of health. A few weeks ago it was expected that the end was approaching. He sank rapidly in the last week, and on Saturday, July 27th, at 11 a.m. he passed peacefully away.

The funeral took place on Monday, and was attended by a large number of personal friends of the deceased. Among those from a distance we note J.M. Baird, manager of Davidson & McRae, and E.A. McKenzie, of Fort Pelly. The latter gentleman was a companion of Mr. Field in earlier days on the frontier. The mourners, comprising the sons and daughters of the deceased, were: Mr. and Mrs. Willis, Miss P. Field and S.B. Field, of Wadena; E.A. Field, of Toronto; Poole Field, from the Klondike, this being his first trip out after sixteen years in the far north. Two sons, S.C. and Mark, are in the west, but so far from a railway that they could not be communicated with in time to attend the funeral.

Beautiful wreaths of flowers spoke of the high esteem in which the deceased was held.

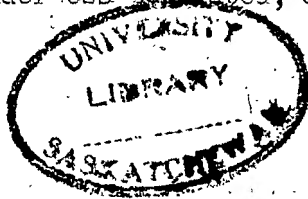
For several years Mr. Field held the position of justice of the peace and his record as a magistrate was a remarkably good one. With an intimate knowledge of the principles of law, and possessing a strong sense of justice, ably blended with a



spirit of moderation, his work on the bench was above reproach.

Coming to western Canada when he did, Mr. Field has lived to see the building of an empire assured; he has seen a wilderness populated, and of the prediction made by Byron:-

"I listen long and think I hear
The hum of that advancing multitude
That soon will fill the desert."



Like many of his frontier companions he learned in the stern hard school of experience the value of patience and fortitude. With the advent of settlers he took with equal aptitude the station befitting him as a leader in his settlements, and after his long journeys over the rugged pathway of frontier life he died as he had lived-"an English gentleman."